

# Grasscycling



**Grasscycling is the practice of leaving grass clippings on the lawn instead of raking or bagging them, saving time, money and improving the health of the lawn!**

Because they are 85% water, the clippings break down quickly returning their considerable load of nitrogen to the soil and adding organic matter that enhances soil structure and texture. Nitrogen is especially important to stimulate heavy populations of beneficial bacterial organisms. A program of sustainable turf management, which includes grasscycling, can dramatically reduce water and fertilizer usage!

## **How and when to mow**

Northwest lawns should not be cut shorter than 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ " to 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Taller grass blades form longer root systems, shade the grass roots and preserve soil moisture. Cutting too short will cause grass plants to form shallow root systems that require more water, tolerate heat poorly and promote the formation of thatch. Thatch can be described as a tightly intermingled layer of partially decomposed stems, roots, and some blades of grass. *Stems and roots are more resistant to decay than grass blades and contribute most to thatch development in all grass varieties.*

The lawn should be mowed frequently to ensure that not more than  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the grass blade is removed. When more than  $\frac{1}{3}$  is removed the grass stem may be cut, not just the blade, stressing the plant and damaging the lawn's appearance. This may mean the lawn will need to be mowed more frequently, particularly in the spring when grass grows rapidly. When grass is very wet or very long grasscycling may not be effective and clippings will need to be bagged and composted or used as mulch in the garden.

Manually powered reel mowers are arguably the best mowers for turf health. Besides being mulching mowers, they give a cleaner cut to the grass blades than do rotary gas powered mowers. They are also clean and emission free while gas powered mowers are a major contributor to air pollution. While they are not required to grasscycle effectively, mulching mowers do have the advantage of cutting the grass clippings into finer pieces, thereby enabling them to decompose more rapidly. Mulching mowers also blow the clippings to the soil surface rather than allowing them to rest on top of the grass plants. An inexpensive alternative to purchasing a mulching mower is to replace the existing blade of a rotary mower with a mulching



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blade, which also cuts the clippings into fine particles. **It is important to keep all lawnmower blades sharp so that the grass blade is cleanly cut and not torn off.**

Good turf management practices also involve annual core aeration of the lawn and compost top dressing. Core aerators remove soil plugs about the size of your little finger, enabling oxygen to reach the grass roots and helping to loosen compactions. Compost top dressing feeds beneficial soil organisms and helps the soil to retain moisture and nutrients. Top dressed lawns use far less water and, when grasscycling is practiced, require far less fertilizer than do lawns not managed using these practices.

For more information on sound turf

management practices contact the Master Composter/Recycler program at (360) 882-4567.

## **For more information**

For more composting information, contact a Master Composter/Recycler at Columbia Springs Environmental Education Center, (360) 882-4567. The Master Composter/Recycler program offers free composting workshops, composting how-to information, low-cost worm bin composting workshops, composting books to purchase, Master Composter/Recycler volunteer training, a reduced price compost bin, composting demonstration sites, teacher worm bin workshop, and speakers for neighborhood or community groups.



### **The Master Composter/Recycler program**

is a cooperative effort of Clark County, Vancouver, Camas, Washougal, Battle Ground, Ridgefield, Yacolt, La Center and Columbia Springs Environmental Education Center. For information, please call (360) 882-4567.



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